

Improving the Quality of Teaching in Washington State: Understanding the Challenges, Informing Policy

**Michael S. Knapp
Margaret Plecki
University of Washington**

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Presentation Overview

- Teacher Quality and State Policy
- A Glimpse of Washington's Teacher Workforce
- The Data Dilemma
- Policy Considerations

“Teacher Quality”

- *What is it? What do we know about it?*
 - Differing definitions
 - Inconclusive research
 - Polarized policy debate

- *Four meanings in contemporary debate*
 1. Teachers' orientations
 2. Teachers' qualifications
 3. Teachers' practice
 4. Student achievement

Figure 1. Three Quality Concerns Confronting State Policy and Educational Reform

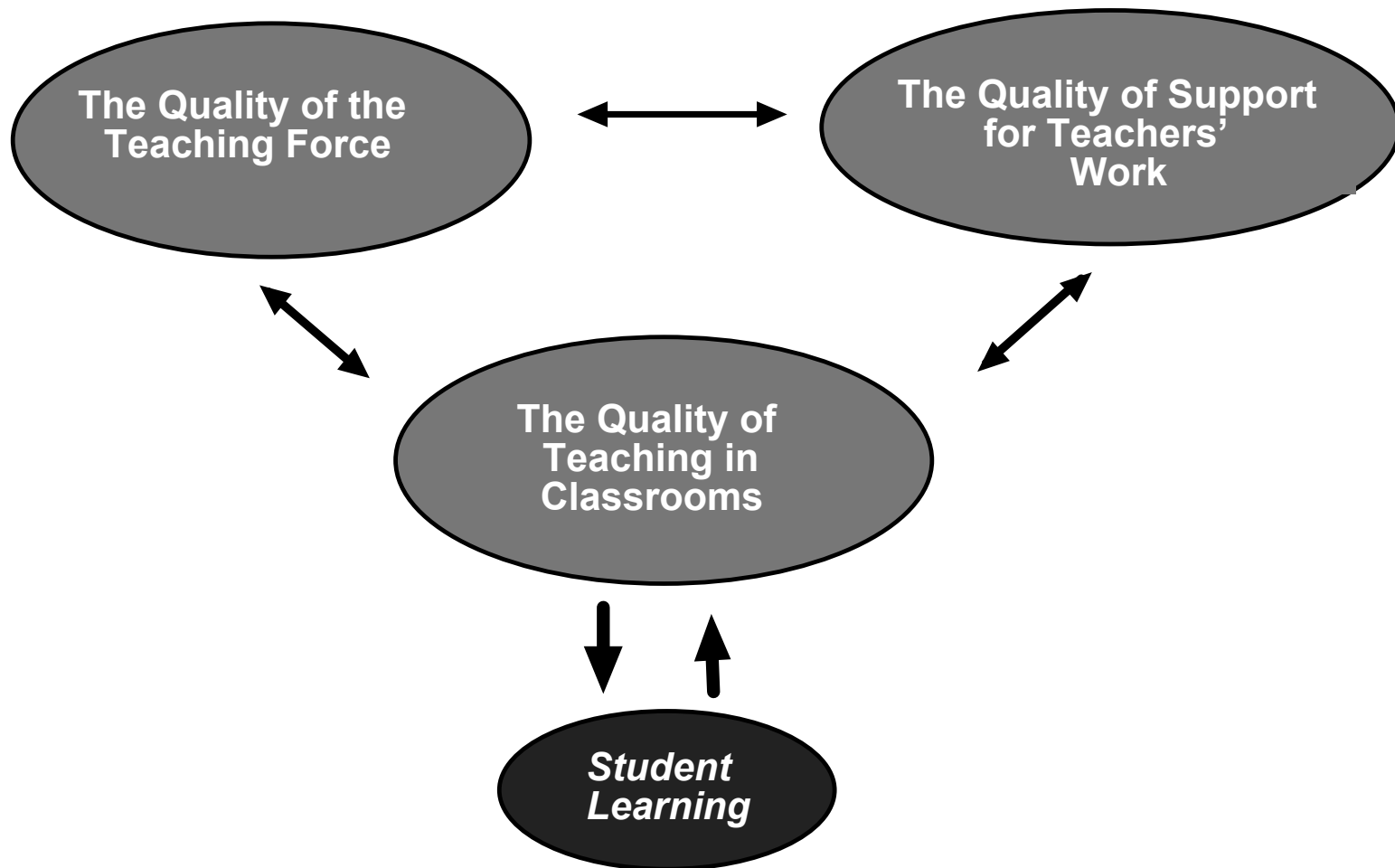
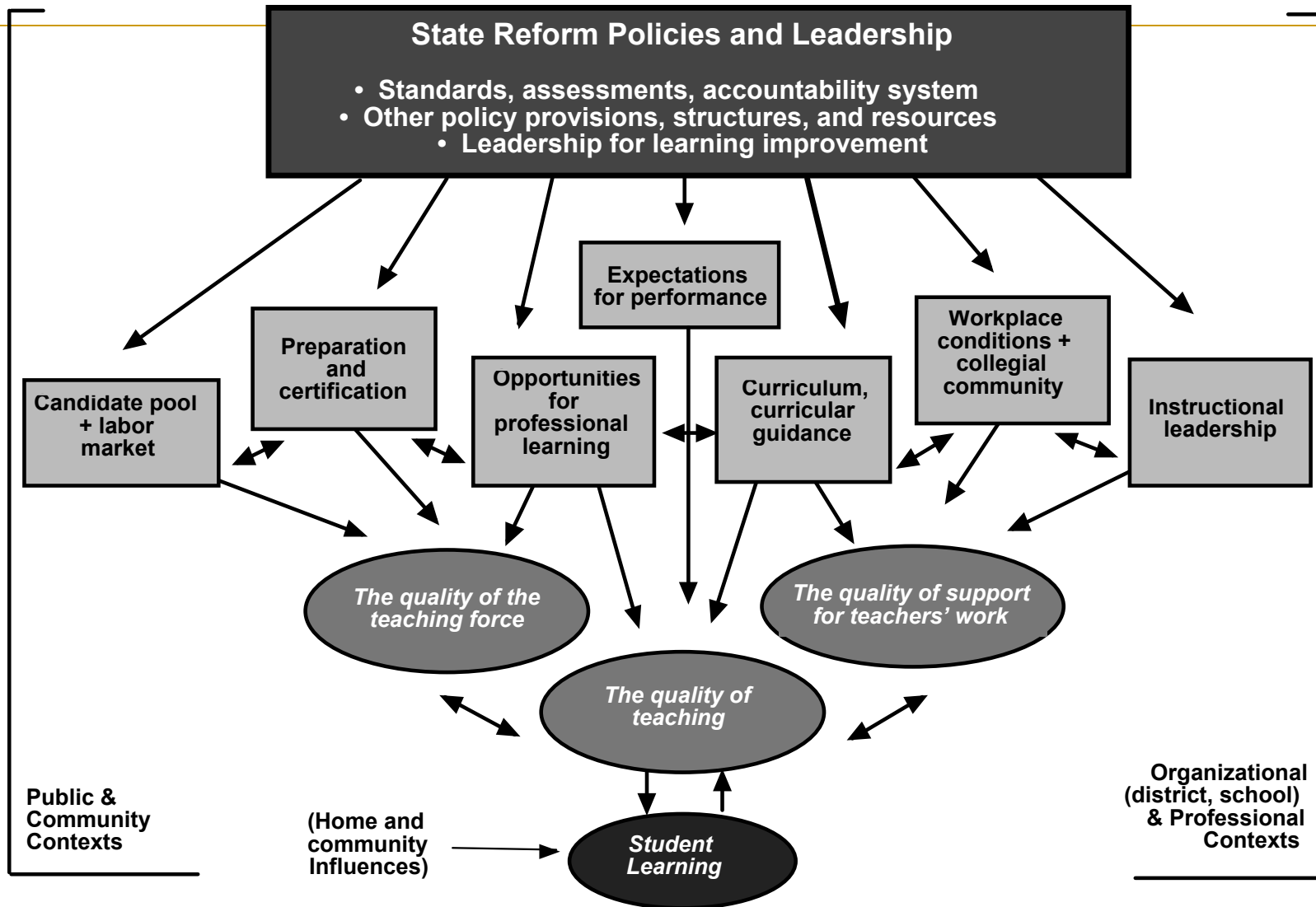


Figure 2. How State Leadership and Reform Policies Can Affect Teaching and Learning



Informing State Policy Aimed at Improving the Quality of Teaching

The challenge generates questions and informational needs –

- Need to know about more than student performance
- Important questions about teachers, teaching, and support for teachers' work
- Potential – and limits – of available data
- Need for greater state-level capacity to inform policies aimed at improving teaching and learning

What Do We Know About the Teacher Workforce in Washington?

With support from a grant by the Stuart Foundation, we examined data for 2000

Data was available regarding:

- Age, ethnicity
- Years of experience
- Degrees earned

Who is in the State's Teacher Workforce?

In 2000, most of Washington's 55,000+ classroom teachers were:

- White (93%)
- Experienced (75% teaching 5+ years)
- Held a master's degree (54%)
- Moderately aging (64% over 40 years)

How Do These Characteristics Vary Across the State?

- *By district size:* Remarkably little variation.
- *By region:* In ESD 121 (Puget Sound)--lower percentages of teachers with advanced degrees and higher percentages in the 21-30 age range. Eastern Washington--slightly more experienced teachers.
- *By poverty level:* In highest poverty districts (76%+ FRPL)--fewer teachers with advanced degrees and a higher percentage of beginning teachers.

Do We Have Enough Teachers to Meet the State's Needs?

- ***Overall:*** Statewide, enough qualified teachers to fill most positions, but with shortages in certain subject areas and regions
- ***Student growth:*** Enrollment statewide projected to grow at a slower rate than the last decade
- ***Teacher growth:*** Increasing number of teachers eligible to retire soon, but also many experienced educators available to take their place
- ***Ethnicity:*** Ethnic profile of the state's teaching force not well-matched to the student population

What Do We Know About Teacher Retention?

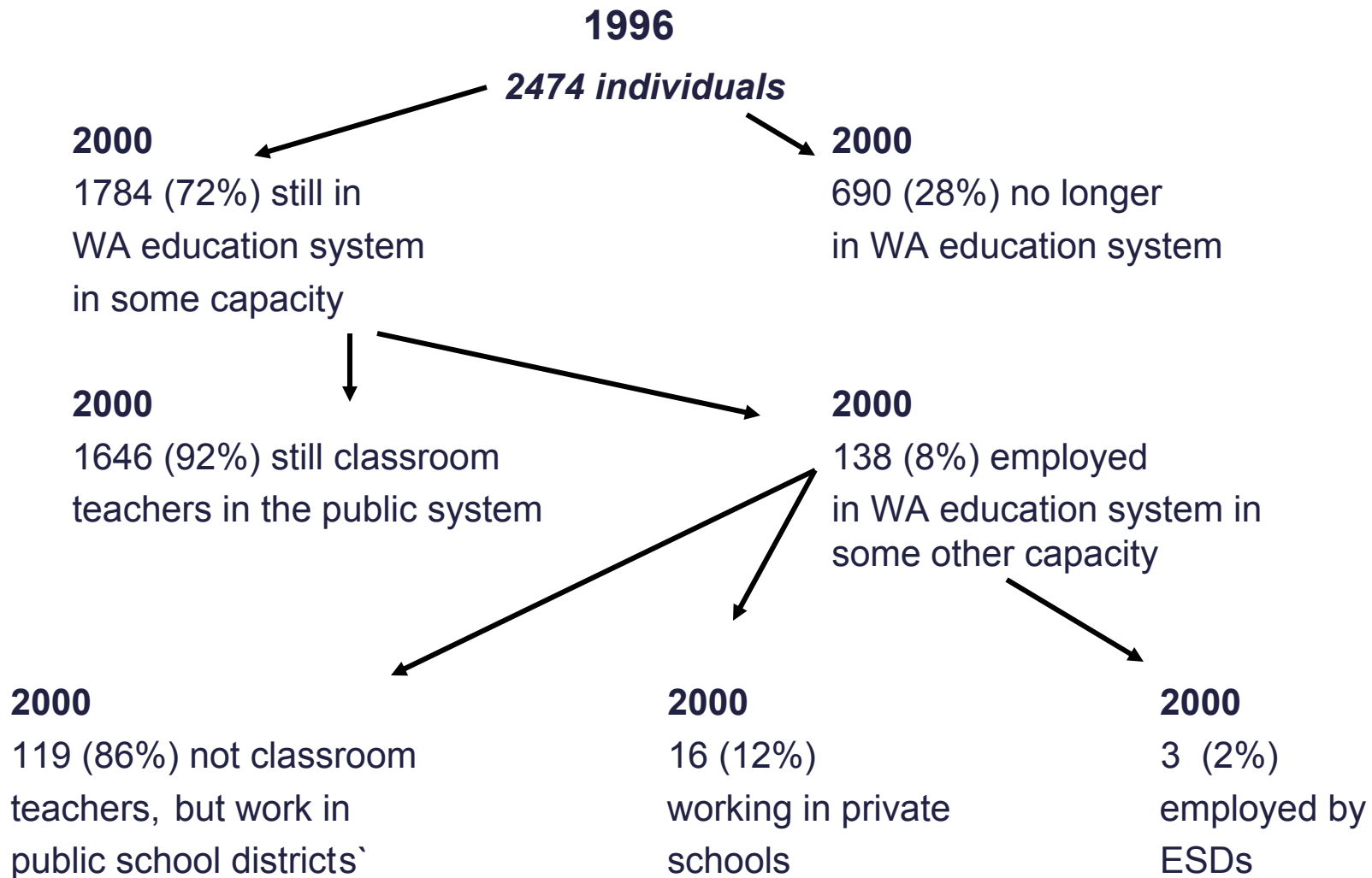
- Numerous factors impact retention, including student enrollment, economics, policy changes, local conditions
- Solid data about retention is key to informing policy decisions
- Limited data nationwide and in the state
- Numerous myths and anecdotes exist

How Long are Beginning Teachers Staying in the Education System?

In the 1996 cohort of beginning teachers:

- 72% of first -year teachers are still in the Washington education system five years later.
- Of those, 92% are classroom teachers.

Retention of 1996 Cohort of Beginning Teachers



Retention Rates are Not Consistent Across Districts

- In a sample of 10 districts, retention of beginning teachers within the district ranged from 0 to 75%.
- The percentage of beginning teachers in these districts who exited the Washington system within five years ranged from 0 to 42%.

Some Unanswered Questions about Teacher Retention

How do retention rates vary by...

- School poverty level?
- Subject matter?
- Grade level?
- Region of the state?
- School and district size?

Data Dilemma

- The state collects significant amounts of data, but it tends to be located in “silos” for specific purposes and is not usually shared.
- A lack of relational database capacity limits access to information about the teaching force.
- Some important data is currently not available.

Types of Data Needed to Conduct Further Analyses

- Specific grades and courses taught
- Assignment by subject matter
- Assignment to particular groups of students
- Certification type and endorsement(s)
- More accurate school-level data
- More accurate poverty data
- Student demographic data linked to school and teacher
- Local funding and how it is used
- Frequency, types, and kinds of professional development opportunities

What This Analysis Says to Policymakers

- Given the relative stability of the state's teacher workforce, *focus on supporting teachers presently in the classroom.*
- While indicators point to an adequate overall supply of teachers, *pay close heed to subject-field and regional shortages, and the distribution of teaching talent, particularly in hard-to-staff schools.*
- *Push for more dynamic and integrated databases, including school-level data, to examine questions of teaching quality and its relation to student learning.*

For more information....

The complete technical report,
“Who’s Teaching Washington’s Children?”
is available from:

**The Center for Strengthening
the Teaching Profession**

at: **www.cstp-wa.org**